



BASIC EDUCATION FOR SELF-RELIANCE IN A DEPRESSED ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

Basic education means a component intended to ensure functional literacy for all jobs participants. Technical and Vocational education remains that form of education which helps its recipients to acquire knowledge and specific skills with which to work and earn a living. Both the Nigerian government and masses have suffered high economic downturns given negligence towards these systems of education. This is evident in the high turnout of people who are either unemployable and at the same time cannot survive except they are dependent in the Nigeria. As a result, this paper examined the relevance of technical and vocational education in making the recipients of basic education self-reliant. Related concepts were extensively discussed and in the course of this review, it was discovered that technical and vocational education will forever be likened to the wand in the hands of a magician with respect to solving the economic problems of any society. Based on this, it was suggested that government and school managers should among other things, do the following: 1) make Practical trainings compulsory for all the children of basic education. 2) Make Basic education programme relevant/attractive through practical and holistic trainings.

Key words: Basic Education, Vocation & technical Education, Economic Depression, Self-reliance

INTRODUCTION

The term basic education has over the years been a topic of controversy, as there seems to be no consensus on what connotes basic education the world over. There is no general agreement on what makes up basic education. To some people it begins and end with the first six years of formal schooling (Upper Basic Education), while some argue that, it stretches across six years of primary and the first three years of middle school (lower secondary education). Others believe that basic education involves all the activities geared towards the acquisition of basic knowledge, whether formally or informally. No matter how it is perceived, all is right. So long as it revolves within the acquisition of basic knowledge for life activities. Strengthening the above, Nhung (2012), opined that each country interpreted the term in different ways and that lead to the 2011 world revision on basic education, where a discussion paper was issued to seek clarification on the concept. However, it is noteworthy, that in spite of the said challenges in conceptualizing basic education, there are some authors, organizations/bodies that have done noble by putting



together what basic education should represent in the real sense. It is a whole range of educational activities taking place in various settings that aim to meet basic learning needs as defined in the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 2006). For more clarification United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO, 2006), added thus, basic education comprises primary education (first stage of basic education) and lower secondary education (second stage). It also covers a wide variety of non-formal and informal public and private activities intended to meet the basic learning needs of people of all ages. Similarly, International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 2014), posits that basic education comprises two stages primary education and lower secondary education. *National Bureau of Statistics* (2010), asserts that education at this level strengthens the learner's feet to climb the educational ladder to the zenith of academic, if a solid foundation is laid. It is also referred to as educational activities designed for people to acquire necessary knowledge and skills to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning (UNESCO, 2020).” *Universal Basic Education in Nigeria - Centre for Public Impact* (2017), noted that before 1976, education policy was still largely shaped by the colonial policy of the British. In 1976, the Universal Primary Education program was established. This program was said to have interfaced with many difficulties and was subsequently revised in 1981 and 1990 accordingly. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) which involves 6 years of Primary School education and 3 years of Junior Secondary School education, culminating into 9 years of uninterrupted schooling, in which transition from one class to another is automatic but determined through continuous assessment testing, was introduced to replace the existing schemes in the year 1999. According to Okpala (2007), The launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was the Federal Government effort to salvage the primary education system which is the foundation stone of other educational levels and in fact, the corner stone of national development. On his own, Fafunwa in Nhung (2012) maintained that the Universal Basic Education covers non-literate Nigerians who make up 45% of our population in addition to all children of school age which represents another 20% of the population making a total of about 65% of Nigerian's population. For the above reason, He opted that 65% of education budget should be allocated to this level of education.

Any system that neglects primary education, which is the very foundation of the entire education system, will not have good secondary or university education and neither its economy, nor its people will progress and as a result poverty, ignorance and disease will envelop the people (Fafunwa, added). Basic education is more than an end in itself. It is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which countries may build systematically, further levels and types of education and training (Unesco, 2006). Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC, 2012), refers to it as early childhood care and education. The scheme covers a 9-year formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skill acquisition programs, and the education of special groups such as nomads



and migrants, girl child and women, Al-majiri, street children and disabled people (Aderinoye, 2007). It is therefore, regarded as free, compulsory and the right of every child. Basic Education being accorded too much importance based on the place it occupies in both individual and national lives should be made more relevant and responsive to the contemporary issues through not just inclusion but a well implemented and managed technical and vocational programmes. Furthermore, this level of education should be left in the hands of people whose managerial prowess is very high. People, whom through their leadership actions/practices may be able to drive home the goals for which the programme was established.

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The terms Vocational and technical education can be traced down to the different interpretations attached to them. According to Kehinde & Adewuyi (2015) it is common to find the terms used compositely when they should be used in a restricted sense and vice versa. Sometimes, where the terms are used separately, jointly or interchangeably, some individual (including intellectuals) interpret ‘vocational’ to mean business subjects or trades, and ‘technical’ to mean technical subjects or studies, or that which has to do with engine or metals. When used in relation to school, ‘vocational school’ is taken to mean where only business subjects are taught, while technical school is taken to mean where only technical subjects are taught. Similarly, Eunice & Nwadioha (2009) posit that “‘vocational’” and technical education are in most cases used interchangeably. However, they are not the same. Vocational education is an aspect of technical education that lay emphasis on skills acquisition and functional education for the development of the society. That is, it leads to employment in a job, a trade or occupation. Technical education (Eunice & Nwadioha) continue, is an aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills. It gives both quality and quantity of the manpower required for transformation of a country in a technical world of work. In a more elaborate manner, Aghenta in Kehinde & Adewuyi (2015) observed a definite distinction between vocational and technical education. Vocational education, he argues, focuses on manipulative skills in non-technical occupations as reflected in fields such as agriculture, business, home economics, painting and decoration. Technical education, on the other hand, is more science-oriented with emphasis on the application of scientific and mathematics principle as applied in such fields as engineering, electronics, electrical, mechanical and automobile trades. From the foregoing, one may infer that technical Education involves the use of knowledge of science, materials and energy to solve problems and improve daily lives and our environment, while vocational education may be referred to as that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills. In summary, they both target production. The above influenced the submission of Kehinde & Adewuyi (2015) who note thus; ‘this goes to support the general notion that ‘vocational’ means that which has to do with business studies, while ‘technical’ stands for that which has to do with technical studies’. It is the type of education designed to prepare skilled personnel at lower levels of



qualification for one or a group of occupations, trades or jobs. Vocational education usually provided at the senior secondary technical schools (technical colleges) includes general education, practical skills, and related theories required by the chosen occupation (UNESCO, 2006). Osayomuanbor and Edokpayi (2008), in the same way define vocational and technical education as that type of education that train and help to prepare the individual for employment in a specific occupation or trade. Osuala (2009) opines that vocational education is the training or retraining which is given to individuals in school or classes for the purpose of skillfulness. Vocational education leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills, as well as basic scientific knowledge that will enable the individual to be prepared for the world of work (Ovbiagele, 2015). According to *National Policy on Education* (2013), Technical and Vocational Education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational processes involving in addition to general education the study of technology and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of the economic and social life of Nigerians. It further expatiates the concept of vocational and technical education to include: an integral part of general education, a means of preparations for participation in the world of work, an aspect of life-long learning and a readying ground for responsible citizenships, and an instrument for promoting environmentally healthy sustainable development. It is however, regrettable that this aspect of the Nigerian system of education have had a slow start and developed less quickly than others. This according to Ovbiagele (2015) could be attributed to the fact that the voluntary agencies that pioneered western education in Nigeria were unable to popularize vocational and technical education on the same scale as literary education.

OBJECTIVES OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The following represents the objectives of vocational and technical education as postulated by Federal Government of Nigeria in *National Policy on Education* (2013).

- Provision of technical knowledge and vocational skill necessary for agriculture, industrial, commercial and economic development.
- To give an introduction to professional studies in engineering and other technologies.
- To give room for young men and women to have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexion of technology.
- Training and impacting of necessary skills leading to the production of craft man, technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self-reliant.
- Provision of trained manpower in applied sciences, technology and commerce, particularly at sub-professional levels.
- To provide people who apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man.



- restructuring the educational system at all levels to respond effectively to the challenges and managing the impact of the information age, and in particular the allocation of development fund to education at all levels

CONCEPT OF ECONOMIC DEPRESSION

Depression is defined as a severe and prolonged recession. A recession is a situation of declining economic activity. Declining economic activity is characterized by falling output and employment levels. Generally, when an economy continues to suffer recession for two or more quarters, it is called depression (The economic times, 2021). According to Mankiw (2013) depression is a more severe version of a recession. To further narrow the scope, economic depression is a time period when the economy slows down and there is widespread unemployment, lack of investments and scarce demand for consumer goods. During a phase of economic depression, firms are facing excess capacity because consumer spending is low and people have less disposable income to sustain consumption, thereby lowering the production and the profitability of firms. More workers are laid off due to downsizing, whereas prices generally fall. The level of productivity in an economy falls significantly during a depression. Both the GDP (gross domestic product) and GNP (gross national product) show a negative growth along with greater business failures and unemployment. Furthermore, investment activity is low, and the market is pessimistic about the future. The intensity of these effects increases as the economy sinks into deeper depression. In many cases, this becomes snow ball that keeps getting worse until economic activity changes.

CONCEPT OF SELF-RELIANCE

Self-Reliance, according to Nnadi in Udaba, Amunnadi and Ele (2017), is a developmental paradigm through which people of a given society mobilize their God-given human and non-human resources to enhance them. It is said to be a survival approach which individuals adopt by harnessing their ability and aptitude to foster “self-reliance and self-sustaining economic and political systems that include among other things problem searching, problem learning and problem solving. Self-reliance is the ability of the individual to take care of him or herself economically without recourse to any third-party’s support (Udeaba, Amunnadi and Ele, 2017). In a similar stretch, Collins Dictionary asserts that, self-reliance is the ability to do things and make decisions by oneself. This usually begins after the period of dependency in life, i.e at the beginning of adulthood and more specifically, from age eighteen. It is however, germane to state at this juncture, that the socio-economic status of every society determines to a reasonable extent when this stage of life occurs. For instance, in economically advanced countries, where there is high income per capita and strong social welfare schemes, dependency period ends shortly after the eighteenth birthday, except where higher education or other related issues would prolong it. But in Nigeria and other developing countries where there is high rate of unemployment, the dependency period may tend to extend far beyond the expected period.



Self-reliance even though not so novel a concept but has become more necessitated in this era of global pandemic where over-dependency and physical contacts are highly discouraged.

BASIC EDUCATION IN SELF-RELIANCE

In Nigeria, people go to school with the hope and belief of becoming contributive to their society. But unfortunately, sustainable participation in every society now requires vocational and technical education. Given the present economic situation, inflation has gone beyond single to double, if not third digits. As a result, government can no longer successfully carry the financial load associated with successive employment. Consequently, the campaign for a restructured system of education that recognizes self-dependence and reliance became top of the list. Vocational education provides the students with variety of skill and abilities and also, give an equal opportunity to all children to prepare for work of life (Anaele, Adelakun, Olumoko, & Kanu, 2014). Vocational and technical education affords learners ample opportunities to learn a variety of skills that guarantee synergistic relationship between the school and the world-of-work. It is an attempt to narrow the gap existing between theory and practice thereby, making meaningful learning possible. It forms a formidable link between classroom instruction, the world of work and career opportunities, as neither school-based learning nor involvement of a learner in professional work alone (i.e. apprenticeship), guarantees the occurrence of appropriate learning to the extent of satisfying the qualification requirements of the work-world (Anaele et al (2014), reiterate). The role of vocational and technical education in making the children self-reliant cannot be over-emphasized as Ogunmola & Ogunmola (2021) rightly submit, through vocational and technical education, individuals are powered socially and economically, that they will be able to participate in the making of decisions regarding policies affecting their lives, to make the citizens and nations to be self-reliant in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Vocational and technical education provide students with life skills that will make them to be productive entrepreneurs, as it engenders creative and innovative ideas; enlarges the economic pie and increases personal freedom. Emphasizing the importance of vocational and technical education, Kehinde & Adewuyi (2015) posit that, vocational and technical education help to solve the problems of unemployment and reduce the number of people who depend on government for jobs. When the youths and adults (Kehinde & Adewuyi) further argue, are trained vocationally or technically, it would enable them to be self-reliant in different areas such as electrical, plumbing, automobile, vulcanizing, computer engineering, GSM repairs, cloth weaving etc. Vocational and technical education always serve as motivating force in individuals to work for the nation because it stimulates technological and industrial development through the production of competent and honest individuals who are capable of utilizing the abundant natural and human resources available in a country for economic and industrial growth and development. It also helps to bring about rapid economic development. The survival of individuals will ensure the



survival of the country as a nation (Kehinde & Adewuyi, 2015). To continually meet the needs of the present generation, means there must be continued economic growth. The commitment of the Federal Government to place Nigeria amongst the top 20 economies in the world by the year 2020 would have been realized if only vocational and technical education among other things were sufficiently made to be within the reach of the teeming Nigerian populace through a well-planned, implemented and administered basic education.

PROBLEMS OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The following as identified by Eunice and Nwadioha (2009), constitute the challenges of vocational and technical education in Nigeria:

1. **Poor Funding:** Vocational and technical education is very expensive as it is capital equipment based. Even though all the tiers of government in Nigeria are interested in funding the course, such governments have approved lean resources to implement it. That is why there is inadequate flow of finance to purchase teaching and learning materials for training students right from the secondary level to that of the tertiary institutions. Practical courses that are supposed to expose students to real practical training in order to match the theory learnt in the classrooms have become a mirage.
2. **Poor economic awareness:** Many youths and adults do not know that vocational and technical education is the only branch of education that can provide gainful and immediate employment to graduates, and that liberal arts education only makes graduates to be job seekers. This is due to erroneous belief that the course is offered to the never-do-well members of the society and it has greatly affected the interest of students in both secondary and tertiary schools towards vocational and technical education.
3. **Inadequate workshops/laboratories for training:** Laboratories/workshops, which house the tools, machines, and equipment for the training of students, are hardly available and the available ones are obsolete. This is why many vocational and technical education teachers resort to theoretical teaching. Where few functioning equipment or machines are available, students are divided into groups. This system is not effective, as many students do not have access to such equipment for practice as much as they want.
4. **Parental Influence:** Some parents have cultivated an undue influence over their children or wards by counseling them on the type of course(s) to be taken due to their educational status.
5. **Consumption of foreign products in preference to home made products:** Many Nigerians still prefer the consumption of foreign products to that of Nigeria. This is invariably killing our infant industries by making such industries to close down while employees become jobless.



6. Power Supply: There is problem of power supply in virtually all parts of the country which made it impossible for small and medium scale businesses to function effectively.
7. Policy and legislative inadequacies contribute to poor performance of vocational and technical education in Nigeria. Some policy provisions like amorphous merger of science and technology education; where science overshadow and stamped most considerations disregarding occupational orientations of vocational and technical education subject area.
8. Lack of appropriate trained personnel and rigid curriculum requirement of vocational and technical education courses and programmes. If these problems would be addressed, our economy will surely be revamped and our vision of top 20 world economies will be a reality.
9. Lack of Mobilization: There is also inadequate mass mobilization by way of publicity campaigns to raise awareness in vocational skill acquisition. This lack of mobilization and advocacy campaigns has tended to stunt the growth of vocational training education.

CONCLUSION

Vocational and technical education is the aspect of Nigerian National Policy of Education that is meant to train individuals in skills for self-sustainability. In this time of industrial revolution, people need to be provided opportunity to constantly learn new skills and newer ways of doing things so as to fit-in properly, become effectively adjusted, more productive and profitable to the society in general and particularly themselves. Also, the forewarned attendant consequences of global economic crisis whose hit is usually more on the developing nations as Nigeria, characterized by mass job losses and high-powered crimes, schools leavers across all educational levels need to be constantly more innovative, creative and interactive with experienced workers in the real-life work environment. Emphasis on restricting knowledge through theoretical/class-based as against practical/work-based is highly discouraged. In a depressed economy like ours, technique and vocations serve as towers for refuge. Summarily, hand-on skills training produces individuals who are more competent in their fields of endeavors than the mere theoretical/class-based training given in most of the Nigerian schools especially in basic education. Hence, the need to not just incorporate vocation and techniques as mere educational programmes in basic school level, but manage and tailor it towards the achievement of self-reliance in children.

RECOMMENDATION / A WAY FORWARD

As a way forward, the following recommendations were made:

1. Basic education programme should be made more relevant/attractive through practical and holistic trainings



2. Practical trainings should be made compulsory for all the children of basic education
3. Sufficient fund should be voted into this level of education for the procurement and maintenance of the necessary apparatus
4. Adequate attention be paid on trainers training for continuous updates and improvement

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